

## ash and ember by prideorvanity

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**Summary:**

Since Billy had woken up bloody and confused on Joyce Byers' kitchen floor, his life in Hawkins had settled into a comfortable routine: go to school, tease Harrington at practice, drive the shitbird wherever she wanted under threat of castration, avoid Neil, attend midnight rendezvous with Hawkins' hottest mom and pretend that he hadn't seen whatever the fuck in the Byers' freezer. And, really, Billy had gotten cocky; he should have expected it when everything went to shit.

Or the one where Steve cleans up Billy in a bathroom and Billy realizes maybe it's not Karen Wheeler he has feelings for after all.

## 1. but epiphany is such a cliché

Since Billy had woken up bloody and confused on Joyce Byers' kitchen floor, his life in Hawkins had settled into a comfortable routine: go to school, tease Harrington at practice, drive the shitbird wherever she wanted under threat of castration, avoid Neil, attend midnight rendezvous with Hawkins' hottest mom and pretend that he hadn't seen *whatever the fuck* in the Byers' freezer. And, really, Billy had gotten cocky; he should have expected it when everything went to shit.

When his trysts with Karen had first started, Billy had been incredibly careful, sneaking silently in and out through the bathroom window. He soon discovered that Ted Wheeler was most often passed out in front of the tv anyway and that the poor bastard was so oblivious that Billy could probably fuck his wife right in front of him and he wouldn't notice. So now Billy took the stairs, still careful enough to skip the squeaky one, and left through the front door after his nights with Karen.

It was Saturday night and Billy was following the usual protocol. He shrugged his shirt on, not bothering with the buttons, as he made his way down the stairs. He was almost home-free at the front door when he heard a soft gasp from the kitchen. Billy's head snapped to the side so fast that it actually hurt and he saw Nancy 'the princess' Wheeler hovering in the kitchen doorway, a glass of water dangling limply from her hand.

Well shit, school was going to be awkward on Monday. Billy knew he was well and truly fucked but he still shot Nancy his most charming smirk before slipping through the front door.

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As expected, Nancy cornered Billy at his locker first thing on Monday morning with the Byers freak trailing behind her. She fixed him with her most murderous glare and opened her mouth to say something but he cut her off--

"So... looks like I'm your new daddy now, huh?"

Three things happened simultaneously: Harrington showed up to open his own locker, Wheeler lunged at him, and Byers looked like he was considering holding her back. In the end, Byers let her take her swing and Wheeler punched him in the nose hard enough to make it bleed. She probably would have kept going if Harrington hadn't slid himself between them. Billy considered his comment to be worth the bloody nose.

"What the hell, Nancy?" Steve admonished while Billy laughed like a maniac.

"It's okay man, I deserved it." Billy told him with a smirk. Turning his gaze on Nancy, he added. "You're feisty like your mother, Wheeler."

As expected, that set her off again and she made another lunge for him but Harrington wouldn't move. Just as Billy was about to shove him out of the way, Byers seemed to take pity on Steve and pulled Nancy back against his chest.

"Shh, Nance... calm down." Jonathan told her.

"But he's sleeping with MY MOTHER!"

Billy dissolved into another fit of laughter as he watched a look of horrified shock settle on Harrington's face. Byers' remained carefully blank; he'd known then.

"Uhh, wow... okay." Steve stammered. "Yeah, you did deserve that." Billy shrugged as if to say 'I told you so.'

The four of them stood around Steve's open locker, not quite sure what to do, until Steve gave Billy's arm a gentle tug. Billy looked at him questioningly but didn't budge and Steve sighed heavily.

"*Come on* , asshole. Let's get you cleaned up."

Without another word, Steve drags Billy toward the bathroom. No one is more shocked than Billy when he goes along without any further resistance. Steve managed to work himself into a frenzy over Billy's behavior during the short trip to the bathroom.

“I’d tell you to apologize to Nancy but we both know how shit you are at that.” Steve told him with a glare. Billy snorted; Steve was referring to the note Billy had shoved in his locker shortly after the incident at the Byers’ house. It had simply read ‘Sorry I busted a plate over your head. -B’

“Worked on you though, pretty boy.” Billy chuckled.

When they enter the bathroom, Steve shoves Billy against the nearest sink and sets to work gathering paper towels. He wets them and starts to clean the blood from Billy’s nose. Billy’s shocked by how gentle Steve is with him; even though the teasing between them had mostly gone back to playful after his half-assed apology, Billy knew that there was still some bad blood between them. As he worked on Billy’s face, Steve kept up a steady stream of rebukes.

“You shouldn’t antagonize Nancy like that... actually you shouldn’t be sleeping with Karen Wheeler in the first place, Billy, what the hell?”

Steve pauses his scolding when he notices that Billy is being uncharacteristically quiet. He’d expected laughter or sarcastic commentary or for Billy to at least generally act like an asshole. But when he backs up Billy’s just staring at him with an unfathomable expression on his face. It’s almost as if he’s never seen Steve before and it’s a bit disconcerting.

“Why... are you looking at me like that?”

Billy manages to school his face back into a neutral facade but he’s panicking. Steve, who has every right to *hate* him, is standing in the bathroom with him, being so incredibly tender, even after Billy had fucked up again. Billy wants to punch himself in the face because he’s pretty sure he’s catching feelings. And yeah, sure, he’d fucked guys in Cali but feelings had never been on the table.

The high school bathroom with Steve Harrington staring at him isn’t exactly the ideal place for him to have an epiphany but he’s realizing that any feelings he’d thought he’d had for Karen Wheeler weren’t real because they were *nothing* compared to what he felt looking at Steve right now. And shit, he’d spent too long staring

because Steve was starting to shift uncomfortably.

“You’ve uhh... got something on your face.” he informed him. Billy internally cursed himself for his lack of smoothness because all Steve would need to do was lean to the side a bit to look in the mirror and Billy would be busted. In a desperate bid to keep his feelings concealed, Billy leaned forward and gently brushed his thumb under Steve’s eye to get rid of the imagined object. He swears he hears Steve’s breath hitch and he freezes with his hand still on Steve’s face. Billy has no idea how long they’ve been standing there staring into each other’s eyes when Tommy H. comes into the bathroom. Billy quickly turns around and pretends to wash his hands while Steve ducks into the nearest stall.

Against his better judgment, Billy waits for Tommy to leave instead of making his escape. When Steve emerges from the stall, he claps him on the shoulder.

“I’ll break it off with Mrs. Wheeler, Harrington.” Billy tells him before walking out of the bathroom.

## 2. bad at love

### Summary for the Chapter:

Billy plays basketball with Steve and makes good on his promise to break things off with Karen

Promises made in the heat of the moment were much easier uttered than kept, as Billy was coming to realize. Breaking things off with Karen had seemed like the obvious choice-- the only choice-- when he'd made his promise to Steve. But now that he'd had nearly an entire school day to second guess himself, Billy wasn't entirely sure he hadn't imagined the *spark* between him and Harrington. He wasn't particularly religious, not like his mother had been, but with the prospect of basketball practice looming over his head Billy prayed to any god who was listening that the connection he'd felt had been a figment of his imagination.

Nervous as he was, Billy still strutted into the locker room like he owned the place. He managed to keep up some half-hearted banter with Tommy even though his eyes never left Harrington as they changed; they'd solve this on the court. Coach Bell blew the whistle for everyone to *get their asses out of the locker room* and it was showtime.

Being forced to question his feelings left Billy in an exceptionally foul mood and he took it out on everyone around him, especially Harrington, by being extra brutal on the court. By the halfway mark, he'd managed to score 17 points and had nearly come to blows with Tommy twice. After the fourth time he floored Steve-- who went down with an almighty *oomph!* each time-- he decided that perhaps he was being too rough with him. After all, Steve hadn't done anything wrong. With that in mind, Billy took a deep breath and went to help him up.

"C'mere, pretty boy."

Steve was understandably reluctant to take his hand but Billy stood his ground until the other boy gave in. Steve gripped his hand softly, probably still fully expecting to be shoved back onto the floor,

but all Billy did was pull him to his feet.

“Huh,” Steve said, looking a bit baffled. “I guess maybe there’s hope for jerks after all.” And yeah, the spark was definitely there.

The smile didn’t leave Billy’s face until he was in the Camaro heading for home.

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Like most good things in Billy’s life, his mood didn’t last. He’d done everything he was supposed to, had even driven Max to meet her loser friends at the arcade without complaint, but he’d still managed to piss off Neil. And now he had to meet with Karen tonight to break things off. Billy still hadn’t figured out exactly how to do that when he snuck out to go to the Wheeler house. He started by doing what could have kept him out of this mess in the first place: came in through the bathroom window.

Karen was waiting for him on the bed, looking inviting in a little black negligee, and it would have been so easy for him to forget about his promise and continue their affair. But then Steve’s face after Billy had helped him up this afternoon flashed through his mind and suddenly she didn’t even seem as *physically* appealing as she had before.

She reached for him but he stopped her with a “Karen, we need to talk.”

“We both know you didn’t come here to talk,” she purred. She stood up from the bed and came forward to push his jacket off his shoulders but he grabbed her wrists.

“Karen, I’m serious!”

She pouted, but seemed to understand that he wasn’t kidding and gestured for him to go on. Billy ran a hand through his hair nervously, not quite sure what to say.

“This has been fun.” he smirked. “ *Lots* of fun. But all good things must come to an end.”

Her eyes welled up with tears and shit this was exactly what he'd been trying to avoid.

"Am I not pretty enough?"

"No, it's not that..." There was no reason to bruise her ego.

"Is there someone else?"

And this was the moment that would make or break the whole encounter. For possibly the first time while ending things with a hook up, Billy was honest.

"Not yet exactly... but there might be."

She nodded and moved away from him to put on a robe. Billy knew that he should stay for a while and try to comfort her--- a good person would.

But being a good person was hard and he left with room with an "It's been real, babe." tossed over his shoulder.

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Luck had apparently decided that it was not on Billy's side today; when he opened the bathroom door, still hoping for a hasty exit, he nearly collided with Nancy. She leveled him with a cold stare.

"Well, that was *quick* ." she said mockingly.

He shrugged, "I just came to end things with you mom actually." He took her look of shock as an opportunity for escape and ducked around her to the bathroom window. He opened it up and perched on the windowsill before pausing to look back at Nancy.

"You can still call me daddy if you want though. Later, Wheeler."

He disappeared into the night.

## Notes for the Chapter:

Hi, I'm Bailey and I really love italics



Thank you so much for all the positive feedback on the last chapter; I especially liked the bit where I'm doing the Lord's work ♥◻

To the anon who said Billy/Karen was a definite no: same buddy. I was cringing just writing their breakup scene but I wanted to write something that would still work after season three inevitably fucks us over with it.

I'm not 100% satisfied with this chapter but I have a plan and the most important thing to get to the good stuff was to end Billy/Karen as soon as possible. And I threw in the basketball scene as a bit of an apology for making you guys go through that. Plus, I really want to get as much done as possible now because updates may become more sporadic at some point.

Thanks for reading! ♥◻

### 3. well of lies

#### Summary for the Chapter:

Billy overhears a conversation between the monster hunting trio and decides to finally get to the bottom of what's going on in Hawkins.

Life in Hawkins was even more mind-numbingly boring without his affair with Karen to break up the monotony. But Billy found the boredom to be worth it because of the huge grin Harrington had flashed him at school the day after the break up; he knew that Steve was probably just happy after Wheeler had informed him that Billy had done the right thing for once, but it gave Billy butterflies nonetheless. Wheeler was even treating him with slightly less disgust; she'd given him a small smile when he'd been at his locker this morning and had bumped his shoulder lightly as they'd walked toward their shared chemistry class. Even Byers had given him a curt nod.

The newfound peace lasted until Thursday afternoon. Harrington, Wheeler and Byers were crowded around Harrington's locker, nothing new; but what was new was the hushed whispers and tense looks on their faces.

"I saw --" Harrington started.

Byers cut in with "And Will said..."

Wheeler cut them both off. "But El--"

She probably would have continued if she hadn't spotted Billy by his locker. Billy normally would have just left them to whatever they were discussing, but Wheeler and Byers were looking more shifty than he was strictly comfortable with. And Steve-- Steve looked like he hadn't been sleeping; the circles under his eyes were almost darker than the black eye Billy gave him had been. He knew he wouldn't get anything out of Wheeler or Byers but Steve might just break if put under enough pressure. Anything that had Harrington looking like that had to be serious; besides, he didn't want Max getting caught up

in their weird cult shit again.

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Billy waited until everyone had left the locker room after practice to set his plan into motion. He walked up to Harrington and pressed him back into the lockers, hoping that the element of surprise would loosen his tongue.

“You’re looking pretty rough lately, princess. You wanna tell me what’s going on?”

To his surprise, Steve snorted.

“And here I thought you were all about charming information out of people, Hargrove.” He tsked mockingly. “Telling me I don’t look my best isn’t the place to start.”

“You’ll notice the word *pretty* was still in there.” Billy practically purred. “Now spill it, Harrington.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, man.”

“You can start by telling me who El is. Or what the Byers kid said... or what you saw. Your choice.”

He watched Steve’s expression close off and knew whatever came out of his mouth next would be a lie.

“Oh!” Steve put a hand to his head as though he were just remembering something. “The kids have this big D&D campaign going on and we all got dragged into it. Nancy, Jonathan and I were just arguing over some of the rules.”

“You’re so full of shit, Harrington.” Billy moved further into Steve’s personal space, going so far as to poke him in the chest. “You know what happens when you lie to me.”

Steve looked rightly pissed at his threat; Billy admired the way that he immediately puffed up even though he’d gotten his ass kicked last time. He realized he wasn’t getting anything out of Harrington and he needed to leave before he did something he’d regret. He was

sure an apology scribbled on torn notebook paper wouldn't cut it this time were he to bash in the other boy's face again.

"Just make sure Max stays the fuck out of it." Billy ground out. He stormed out of the locker room leaving a very distressed looking Steve in his wake.

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With no other options in sight, Billy found himself pulling up to the Byers house later that evening. He stomped up the driveway and banged on the door; he wasn't in the mood to fuck around this time. A flustered looking Joyce Byers opened the door on his second knock and it was only the fact that she'd been surprisingly cool about finding Billy passed out in her wrecked kitchen that stopped him from shoving right past her and into the house. Instead he put on his most charming smile.

"Mrs Byers! I was hoping you could answer a few questions for me."

Joyce sighed. "Honey, could you please get that look off your face; you just look smarmy. I know you've got a reputation with the moms in this town but I'm not Karen Wheeler." She opened the door a bit further. "Come in and I'll see what I can do for you."

She gestured for him to sit down at the table and he did, looking around the now-tidy kitchen to stall for time. She cleared her throat and he decided to just come right out with it.

"There's something seriously fucked up about this town."

Surprisingly, she didn't scold him for his language. Instead she responded with a simple "Oh?" and gestured for him to continue.

"I saw that thing in your fridge... you can't tell me that was a normal animal. And I overheard some shit between Jonathan, Nancy and Steve. Harrington looks pretty fucked up right now; you have to tell me what the hell is going on."

"I'm going to give you a little advice, Billy. For your own safety, you need to let this go. Whatever you think is going on, we've got it

handled.” She pinched the bridge of her nose briefly before lighting a cigarette. “I think you’d better leave before Jonathan gets home.”

“I *won’t* let this go.” Billy snarled. He stormed out of the house, slamming the door behind him, and within seconds was roaring down the road in the Camaro.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Hi guys! I'm so sorry I left you hanging for so long without an update. Like everybody and their brother, I ended up with the flu. But I'm back and I hope you enjoy!!

## 4. every breath you take

### Summary for the Chapter:

Billy is (incredibly bad at) stalking Steve. Tommy is confused, Steve is annoyed, but it finally pays off.

Billy needed a plan. Or some luck. Either way, something needed to change because his current course of action was to follow Harrington around like a lost puppy in hopes of either integrating himself into his group so much that they'd slip and start talking around him or annoying Harrington to the point that he would tell him what was going on just so Billy would leave him alone. So far, all of Billy's effort had only amounted to a very sore back after one particularly uncomfortable night spent sleeping in a tree outside Steve's bedroom window.

He was eleven days into his heavy surveillance act and starting to get frustrated; it looked like Harrington really didn't do much apart from going to school and shuttling those kids around like some sort of *mom*. Today was a school day, so in terms of his stakeout, Billy was mainly trailing a few steps behind Steve between classes. He was straining to hear what Harrington and Wheeler were discussing when Tommy appeared at his elbow.

"Hey, man!" Tommy started and *god* if his voice didn't grate on Billy's last nerve. "What the hell are you doing following Harrington around?" Billy had to resist the urge to shove Tommy face first into the lockers when Steve, who'd obviously overheard, turned around and shot him a bemused little smile. Apparently unaware of how fast Billy's rage was about to overtake him, Tommy continued, edging around so he and Billy were face to face.

"Like... is this some kind of new harassment tactic? I don't really get it. Anyway, you have to stop blowing everyone off; Melanie Carmichael's been trying to ask you out for ages." Billy shouldered him out of the way and kept walking.

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At lunch, Billy took things a step further than usual. Normally, he'd just sit two tables away, with Tommy and company, and watch Steve's table. But today he plopped down right next to Steve and stole a fry from his tray, completely ignoring the betrayed look Tommy gave him.

"Hey, pretty boy." he drawled, snatching half of Steve's sandwich and taking a bite. He had to force down a chuckle at the affronted look on Steve's face.

"Is this gonna be a thing now?" Nancy sighed.

"Aw, don't be like that. I thought you'd miss me now that I'm not prowling around your house at night..." Billy winked. He had to dodge the roll Nancy lobbed at his head.

Byers shrugged and started talking about some photography-related thing that Billy didn't care about, so he took the opportunity to watch Steve uninterrupted: the way his big brown doe eyes lit up when something sparked his interest, how long and dark his eyelashes were, and that *mouth*. He noticed the look of frustration that suddenly appeared on Steve's face and followed his gaze down to his hands where they were struggling to open a fruit cup. Without really thinking about it, Billy snatched it from Steve and ripped it open. Steve was wide-eyed when he handed it back but offered a mumbled 'thank you'. After a few moments, Billy noticed that the table had gone dead silent and finally looked across the table to where Jonathan and Nancy were staring at him open-mouthed in shock. He steeled himself to stare them down but the bell signaling the end of lunch saved his ass.

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That afternoon, after dropping his little collection of nerds off, Harrington broke routine. Sadly, his break in routine was simply to go grocery shopping and Billy felt it really said something about the state of his life that he was spending his Monday afternoon following Steve around the grocery store while he hummed along to the radio and bought obnoxiously posh food. After an agonizing 45 minutes, Steve finally made it through the checkout line and Billy was right behind him, ready to head to the Camaro and follow him to his next

destination. To his shock, Steve spun around and faced him on his way out the door.

“If you’re going to keep following me around, the least you can do is carry these to my car for me.” Steve huffed before unceremoniously shoving his shopping bags into Billy’s arms.

Billy isn’t quite sure how to respond so he dutifully carries the bags to Steve’s car.

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That night, Billy decided to try sleeping in the tree again. But this time, he’d come prepared with a case of beer and a sleeping bag that he’d stolen from Max. He really isn’t having a half-bad time, considering it’s March and still cold as balls. But around 2 am, Steve’s window opened and startled him from his doze.

“Jesus Christ, Hargrove,” Steve whisper-yelled. “Go *home* ! This is literally stalking and it’s getting old... I could call Hopper and have your ass in jail so fast.”

Billy nearly fell out of the tree in shock; he hadn’t realized Harrington knew he was there. He quickly recovered enough to call out a reply.

“You want me to leave? All you’ve gotta do is tell me what the hell is going on in this town.”

Steve stood in the window glaring at him for a few seconds before slamming it shut and turning off his light. Billy smirked to himself and went back to sleep.

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On Saturday, day sixteen, things finally got interesting. Harrington picked up all of the little nerds, including Max, from the arcade and drove toward the junkyard on the edge of town; Billy followed from a safe distance behind. He parked off to the side, where he could see them hauling garbage around but they couldn’t see him. He must’ve fallen asleep at some point because when he woke it was dusk. He couldn’t quite figure out what had made him jerk awake in the first



place, but then he heard the screams. From his vantage point he saw Harrington, standing protectively in front of the kids and poised to swing with a baseball bat full of nails. He was facing a horde of... were those dogs? Billy snorted; only in Hawkins were you likely to be attacked by a pack of rabid dogs in a junkyard. But he saw the look of genuine horror on Steve's face and could pick Max's scream out of the chaos, so he knew he had to act.

As if hearing his thoughts, one of the dogs turned to look at him. Billy was forced to re-categorize the creature from 'dog' to 'monster' when its flower-like face opened up to reveal rows of razor-sharp teeth. On pure reflex he gunned the Camaro and raced across the junkyard toward where Steve was holding the monsters at bay. He managed to take out quite a few of them with his car and made the rest scatter. He only took a moment to be annoyed about the damage he'd just done to his fender before he jumped out of the car, leaving the door open and the motor running.

"You look like you could use some help, pretty boy."

"Get the kids in the car and go!" Steve shouted at him frantically.

Then Max was screaming, "Behind you!" Billy whirled and saw one of the creatures eying him like he was a piece of meat.

"You want some?!" he goaded it. It was only when the monster sprung that he realized he didn't have a weapon.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

This one was actually so much fun to write guys!  
Billy is now (almost) in the know.

## 5. my blood, i'll go with you

### Summary for the Chapter:

Billy faces down the demodog

By the grace of instinct and adrenaline alone, Billy managed to plant his feet before the monster hit him square in the chest. It wasn't enough; the monster was surprisingly strong and he flew backward, landing roughly with it on his chest. It opened its mouth, clearly ready to devour him. Left with no other options, Billy balled up his fist and swung. He connected with the side of the thing's head and the creature flinched back, mouth closing as it was momentarily stunned.

Billy used the thing's distraction as an opportunity to shove it off of him and roll to his feet. Steve had rushed forward with his bat, ready to assist, but Billy gestured him back without really seeing him. His bloodlust had taken over.

Before the creature had even fully recovered, Billy gave it a kick to the throat with one of his steel-toed boots. The thing let out a high-pitched yelp before backing off slightly with a little whimper. Billy advanced on it, landing another blow to its now closed face. Sensing it was starting to lose the fight, the creature tried to slink around him but Steve was there, protecting his back, and it ended up with a few gashes in its side from Steve's nail bat for its troubles.

Now forced to face Billy head on again, the creature emitted a snarl and prepared for another lunge. Billy was quicker; he seized a rock from the ground and threw it at the creature's head, connecting with a loud *thunk* .

He vaguely heard a couple of the kids cheering behind him and gave a maniacal laugh. Sensing that he wasn't running out of energy any time soon, the creature retreated a few steps before turning tail and running. It seemed to be the leader of the pack because the others, who had previously been flanking it, turned to follow. Billy turned to give the others a slightly crazed grin.

“They’ll be back,” Steve muttered, sounding a bit shaken. “We need to go.”

Billy gestured to the still running Camaro in invitation.

“You might be able to squeeze all the kids in there, but I’ll have to make a run for my car.”

“I’m going with you!” piped up the one that Billy had privately nicknamed Toothless.

Steve looked ready to argue but seemed to realize there wasn’t time and nodded.

“Meet at the Byers’ house,” he told Billy before taking off at a run, the curly-haired kid in tow.

Billy picked up Max, shoving her through the driver’s side door. As she scrambled over the gearshift and into the passenger seat, he snapped for the other three kids to get in. Instead of getting into the car after they were safely in the backseat, Billy stood by his open car door and watched Steve’s progress, ready to intervene if he ran into trouble. It was only when Steve and Toothless reached the Beamer and threw themselves inside that he jumped into the Camaro and raced off, tires squealing and eyes on the rear view mirror to make sure Steve was right behind him.

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Billy screeched to a halt in the Byers’ driveway; Steve pulled in seconds after and had barely shut his engine off before he and the curly-haired kid were out and running toward the door. Billy gestured for the other kids to follow suit, bringing up the rear and half carrying Max.

The group stood in the living room trying to catch their breath while Joyce fussed over them and the chief of police, Hopper, demanded to know *what the hell happened* . Billy didn’t really care to

comment, too stunned when Max turned around and buried her face in his chest. He slowly, hesitantly put his arms around her.

The rest of the kids were talking over one another, creating an incoherent vortex of sound, until Steve finally threw up his hands and yelled “Fucking crazy!”

“What’s crazy, honey?” Joyce asked him calmly.

“Hargrove almost took one of the demodogs out with his bare hands.”

Billy took a moment to catalogue what those *things* were called before Hopper was rounding on him demanding to know if it was true.

Joyce cut in before he could answer, “It’s not possible. Bob...” But Hopper kept waiting for Billy’s answer.

“I kicked it with my boots and I threw a rock at it; it wasn’t just my hands,” Billy told him sheepishly. “And Harrington got in a pretty good hit with that bat of his.”

“That shouldn’t be possible,” Hopper reiterated Joyce’s earlier assessment. “It should have torn you apart.”

A dark haired girl appeared at his shoulder then and said softly, but with conviction, “Possible.” That seemed to settle the matter and Hopper turned to the rest of the kids for an explanation on why they had been at the junkyard in the first place.

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By the time the kids had been thoroughly questioned and Billy had been brought up to speed on what was really going on in Hawkins, it was late. Nobody seemed quite willing to venture back out into the dark to go home, so Joyce began giving them room assignments. Max and the dark-haired girl, who turned out to be the

mysterious El, would share Will's room, Jonathan and Nancy would be in Jonathan's and the boys could build a pillow fort in the living room, which left Billy and Steve.

Joyce smiled apologetically, "There's the couch and a recliner; you boys will have to duke it out." She paused for a moment and added, "and NOT with your fists this time."

At this, everyone started to drift off toward their assigned areas. Billy almost hadn't noticed that Joyce neglected to mention Hopper when she gave out sleeping arrangements until he saw the man following her into her room. He turned to Steve, about to offer up the couch, but Steve beat him to it.

"I don't think I'll be able to sleep anyway, so I'll just take the recliner."

Billy sighed and kicked off his boots before flopping onto the couch; Steve turned to go to the recliner before he was stopped with a soft "C'mere, pretty boy". He walked dutifully toward the sofa, assuming Billy wasn't done talking to him. He blamed his surprise for his lack of resistance when Billy grabbed him by the wrist and dragged him down on top of him.

Steve struggled to get up for a moment before a strong arm slid securely around his waist and Billy murmured in his ear, "It's okay, I've got you... I'll protect you." Steve knew he should get up, grab his bat and sit up all night in the recliner keeping watch but something about the tone of Billy's voice made him feel safe. Instead of fighting, he snuggled in more comfortably, his head on Billy's chest so he could hear his heartbeat and feel the rumble of his voice when he told him to go to sleep.

Billy tried to hide his surprise that his plan had worked and focused on pulling the blanket off the back of the couch and settling it over them. Some part of him knew he would be panicking over this in the morning, but as soon as Steve's breathing evened out he followed the other boy down into slumber.

**Notes for the Chapter:**

Hey guys. I'm sorry I was gone for so long... I had some personal tragedies and ended up falling into a depression spiral that I'm still trying to crawl my way out of. But this fic is definitely not over; I still have tons of ideas!

**Author's Note:**

special thanks to tumblr user fredsythe for letting me scream in her ask box.

this is my first harringrove fic and I'd love feedback. come yell with me (or at me) on tumblr: @dandelionisaks